

Jose Munoz
Director, Coalition for Community Schools
Interim Director, Institute for Educational Leadership

Testimony for the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies

May 19, 2021

Good morning Chairwoman DeLauro, Ranking Member Cole, and esteemed Members of Congress: My name is Jose Munoz, and I serve as the Interim Director for the Institute for Educational Leadership, or IEL, and as the Director of the Coalition for Community Schools, which is based at IEL. IEL is focused on cultivating and activating leadership for greater collaboration to improve outcomes for students, families, and communities across America. The Coalition for Community Schools, home to the growing community schools movement, is an alliance of hundreds of national, state, and local partners spanning education, health, youth development, workforce, civil rights, and more who advocate for community schools as a key equity strategy to not only improve student outcomes but also to help families and communities thrive. I am here this morning to speak about the Full-Service Community Schools Program, which is in Title IV Part F of the Every Student Succeeds Act and administered by the U.S. Department of Education. On behalf of the Coalition for Community Schools, our request-is to significantly increase the program for FY 2022 to match the Administration's budget request of \$443 million.

Community Schools is an evidence-based strategy proven to be effective serving students and families, but also achieving the outcomes we all want to see. Additionally, Community Schools are efficient, being good stewards of individual, private, and public resources from the

school level to the community level. Essentially, Community Schools are a strategy that coordinates relationships and resources through a public school to accelerate equitable outcomes in health, education, and employment. The four pillars of a community school are:

- 1) Integrated student supports
- 2) Expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities
- 3) Active family and community engagement
- 4) Collaborative leadership practices

The Learning Policy Institute and National Education Policy Center conducted a [review](#) of nearly 200 studies of community schools and concluded that it meets the criteria for an evidence-based improvement strategy in the Every Student Succeeds Act. The nation's largest community schools initiative, in New York City, has proven more [effective](#) in increasing graduation rates and student achievement, and decreasing chronic absenteeism and disciplinary incidents over the last 6 years compared to demographically-similar non-community schools. And in Cincinnati, a district-wide commitment to community learning centers-their term for community schools-has enabled the district to narrow the black-white achievement gap significantly over time.

Community Schools are also extremely efficient in the way that they leverage resources from the community to supplement and enhance the resources available in the school, and in the way that they blend and braid public and private funding toward a comprehensive and community-wide strategy. A [study](#) from Albuquerque, New Mexico's community schools shows that for every dollar invested in the salary of a community school coordinator, saw over \$7 in return given the amount of resources this role and the strategy yields for the school and district.

It is no wonder, then, that so many communities across the country are starting and scaling community schools. Yet, the demand far exceeds the ability of many communities to

fund one or more community schools, at least at first. This is where the federal Full-Service Community Schools program is so important. This program has enabled dozens of hard-strapped communities to start and scale community schools, and then sustain this work through allocating portions of public funds like Title I and private funds to keep the work going. Federal funding for community schools should prioritize the highest-need schools and communities. Pre-pandemic there were over 40,000 Title I schools with concentrations of students in poverty who would significantly benefit from the coordinated and enhanced supports and enrichment that community schools provide. Yet, the program's current level of \$30 million was only able to fund 18 new grantees in 2020, which is a drop in the bucket compared to the needs and demand for a coordinating strategy like this that we are seeing across the country coming through the pandemic.

We have witnessed-both before and during the pandemic-how community schools can transform not only student outcomes but also meet immediate needs and create new opportunities for families and communities, leading to greater economic mobility. A great story from my city of Albuquerque, NM captures this impact extremely well. Back in 2012, one of the coordinators organized a meeting with parents to learn about their needs and desires, with conversations facilitated in Vietnamese, Spanish, and English. She learned that the Spanish speaking group wanted their children to have a smoother transition into kindergarten but at the time there were no Spanish language preschools in the community. At the same time and related to this lack of opportunity, Spanish speaking students scored much lower on kindergarten readiness than English speaking students, especially in reading. The parents and community school coordinator worked together to start an informal preschool coop in an empty classroom of the elementary school where parents came together to offer their children a preschool experience

by rotating the responsibility of teaching amongst themselves. Seeing the success of this, the coordinator then facilitated grant writing processes to fund a paid Manager who developed curriculum, recruited and trained parent-teachers, and oversaw the program operations. The University of New Mexico Family Development Program (FDP) further supported the Co-op with trainings and introduced the Coordinator to a program within the state's Public Education Department which provided scholarships for the 14 Spanish speaking parent-teachers to go through the Child Development Certification program. The Coordinator worked extremely hard to ensure the parents, some of whom had only a minimal education or no documentation, could enroll. All 14 parents graduated successfully from the program. Kindergarten teachers reported that students who participated in the Preschool Co-op entered kindergarten better prepared to learn than those who did not participate. Finally, because the community school coordinator knew the program could not be sustained by grant money alone, leveraged a partnership with the University of New Mexico School of Law Economic Justice Clinic who helped the parents establish a cooperatively owned preschool LLC. And this preschool coop continues to thrive and support many preschool children today.

Throughout the pandemic, community schools were able to mobilize quickly and effectively to support the social, emotional, physical, and learning needs of students and their families. At Ganesha High School in Pomona, CA, when one student's mother died from Covid and their father was on a ventilator, staff and community partners of this community school [dropped off groceries and connected the family to counseling](#), and mobilized emergency aid to address the hospital bills so the family could stay in their home. We at the Coalition hosted a series of virtual town halls starting in March 2020 that captured dozens more examples of this

kind of mobilization for student, family, and community support to ensure students' needs were met and their learning could continue.

I understand that going from the current level for the Full-Service Community Schools program of \$30 million to match the President's budget request of \$443 million is a big increase. However, because we know Community Schools is an effective and efficient strategy, particularly for our most vulnerable students and communities, and that we are still in a pandemic that has made millions more young people, families and communities vulnerable whether through inadequate access to learning, economic instability, health challenges, or all of the above, then I would argue this is both a smart and just investment to ensure our students can receive the best education possible and that their families and communities have support and opportunities to get on track to flourish.

This session, Congress has also recognized the value of Community Schools: first through federal legislation -the Full-Service Community Schools Expansion Act (S. 385/H.R. 1241)- that calls for \$500 million for the program and increasing to \$1 billion by 2025; and through reference in the American Rescue Plan of community schools as an allowable use of funds for school districts for mental health services. I ask that you continue to recognize the value and return on investment of Community Schools in your FY 2022 budget by increasing the Full-Service Community Schools program to \$443 million.

Thank you for your continued support of Community Schools in your districts and states and in general, and for your continued advocacy for children and families. On behalf of the Coalition for Community Schools, we look forward to continue to be a resource for you and to work with you to ensure all students are supported by their schools and communities working together to help them achieve success during and beyond their time in public education.